

Minutes of the 462nd NESC Council Meeting (in person), Thursday, 24th September 2026 @ 10am

The Clock Tower, Department of Education, Marlborough Street, Dublin 1

Attendance: Liz Canavan (Dep Chair), Brid O'Brien, Naomi Feely, Seán Healy, Ian Talbot, Nichola Mallon, TJ Flanagan, Damian McDonald, Gerard Brady, Andrew Brownlee, Colin Scott, Diarmuid Torney, Colette Byrne, Niamh Moore-Cherry, Noelle O'Connell, Caroline Whyte, Karen Ciesielski, Kevin Callinan, Kevin Daly (DoF), Paul O'Neill (DCEE), Niall Egan (DSP), Aine Maher (DETE) and Margaret Heffernan (DCU).

Secretariat: Larry O'Connell, Siobhán O'Sullivan, Cathal FitzGerald, Colette Bennett, Gráinne Collins, Niamh Garvey, David Hallinan, Gemma O'Reilly, Jeanne Moore, Damian Thomas, Paula Hennelly and Erin Kehoe.

Apologies: John Callinan (Chair), John Enright, Jerry Mac Evilly, John Hogan DoF (Kevin Daly attended), Graham Doyle DHLGH, Declan Hughes DETE (Aine Maher attended), John McKeon DSP (Niall Egan attended), and David Maloney DPER.

- 1. Administration:** Revisions were suggested to the June Minutes in respect of the discussion on *Resilient, Secure & Prepared Ireland*.
- 2. Remote and Hybrid Working:** Professor Margaret Heffernan, Chair of the Working Group, outlined the aims of the work and introduced the report. The Council welcomed the report as comprehensive and thanked the Working Group. The issues raised included the treatment of cross-border working; not-for profit work settings; people who cannot avail of remote/hybrid working and related inequities; the foregrounding of potential transformative impacts of remote work and the wider benefits including rural and regional revitalisation, local enterprise, volunteering, reduced congestion on roads, work-life balance, and lower emissions; the importance of place-based investment, suitable types of housing, flexible and networked transport and a strong indigenous and community enterprise. It was agreed that the work would be finalised by written procedure.
- 3. Social Cohesion:** Colette Bennett provided an update on Social Cohesion including the November 23 & 24 conference, ongoing research and revisions to the Council report. Members welcomed the breadth of the report and the significant evidence base. The issues raised included: cohesion and resilience; consensus and living with difference; significance of values and culture in their own right; continuing forms of social partnership and dialogue, their impact and the need for ongoing openness to review and reimagining to ensure relevance; distrust of formal institutions generally; the role of mediating institutions; two-way trust and meaningful participation; regulating mis/dis-information and its broader geo-political dimension; impact of the recommendations and links to existing work and initiatives. It was agreed that the report needed some further editing to crystallise the argument's key points and to draw out some more concrete connections between recommendations and current state-of-play, enabling environment or building blocks. A further version would be discussed in December.
- 4. Climate Reflections:** Gemma O'Reilly introduced the paper. Members welcomed the paper, noting that it is a timely reminder of the importance of climate action even as cost of living, housing and infrastructure dominate attention. The issues raised included hope and progress being made; good momentum at local level; economic opportunities & co-benefits; the role of nature based solutions in mitigation and adaptation; role of the Climate Action Delivery Board, other Governance mechanisms and legislative specifics and challenges; issues faced by people in situations of vulnerability; construction as a sector for climate action; looking at policy beyond 2030; and the overall structuring of the report. A further version will be discussed in December.
- 5. Loneliness:** Siobhán O'Sullivan provided an update on the project. There was broad agreement on the substantive questions to be addressed. It was noted that the framing of loneliness as a policy issue needs special attention and that it lends itself to a cross-governmental approach, recognising this can bring accountability challenges. The life-cycle approach and the role of social media (both positive and negative) were highlighted as areas of interest for the report. A draft report will be brought to the December meeting.

Next meeting will take place on Thursday, 17th December 2026, at the Clock Tower, Marlborough Street.